

The Program Manager as a Coordinator

Program Managers Either Win or Lose Respect as They “Walk the Talk”

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Books have been written on this subject, and this article will not be one. However, it is important to touch on the many activities *the program manager, as a coordinator*, must or should coordinate to facilitate the smooth planning that precedes successful source selection planning and subsequent development of the solicitation.

Range of Activities

Once the decision has been made to conduct a source selection, program managers or the lucky people in charge are faced with not only completing the required activities specified in DoD 5000.1/2, but also with many other coordinating activities they were probably not aware of. These activities range from personnel problems to redirecting the acquisition strategy. How program managers develop a vision and manage these activities will set the tenor and the ambiance for the program office. As a result, the staff will either love or hate coming to work.

The figure captures some of the areas I thought were important in the preparation of a recent major space systems source selection. I'll discuss each, addressing them in the order they occurred in our program office, suggesting alternatives that could provide for a smoother preparation process.

Objectives

Program managers must address both the long- and short-term objectives. By virtue of their positions, program managers are the ones with the “Big Picture.” They must convey to their staff the policies under which they are working, end goals, timeline, what is being procured, and a general idea of how they would like to proceed with the preparations. Major milestone reviews and the supporting activities must be conveyed to their staffs.

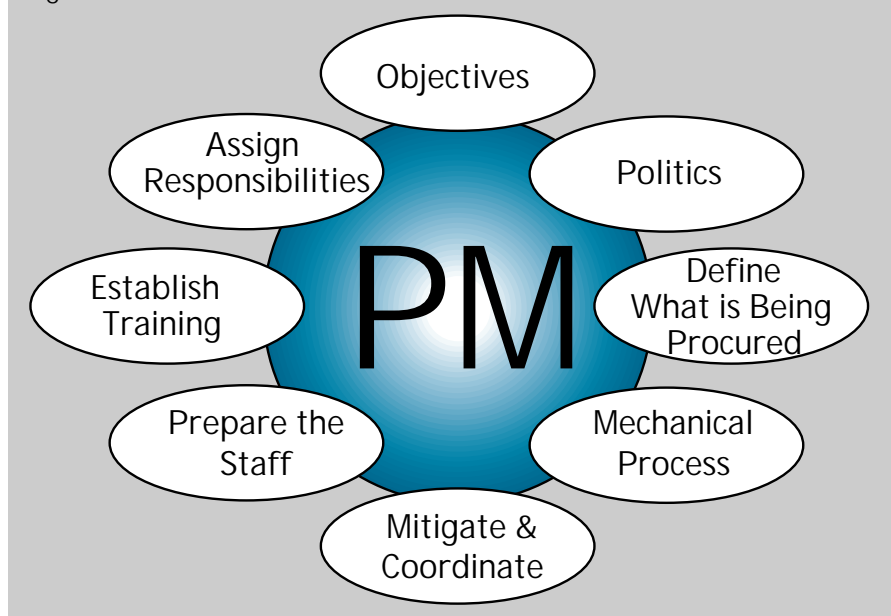
Frequently, they interact with other organizations that potentially may affect the source selection. The staff needs to be aware of these external offices and programs that they may be coordinating or interfacing with. Issues like how far one of their staff members can negotiate on Interface Control Document (ICD) specifications are

important — one dB can translate into millions of dollars for a program. The program managers set the tone for how much technical margin (we call these Program Pearls) they are willing to bargain with.

Finally, the source selection process is a process of rules and procedures, established, developed, and refined by the program office. The program managers' challenge is how to convey to their staffs the philosophy of the rules they want developed (such as a “Best Value” strategy, or lowest cost, or best technical, etc.) and how to abide by those rules during the actual source selection.

Program managers are the pacers for short-term goals. Progress in the preparations for source selection can only be measured by meeting short-

Figure. The PM, A Coordinator



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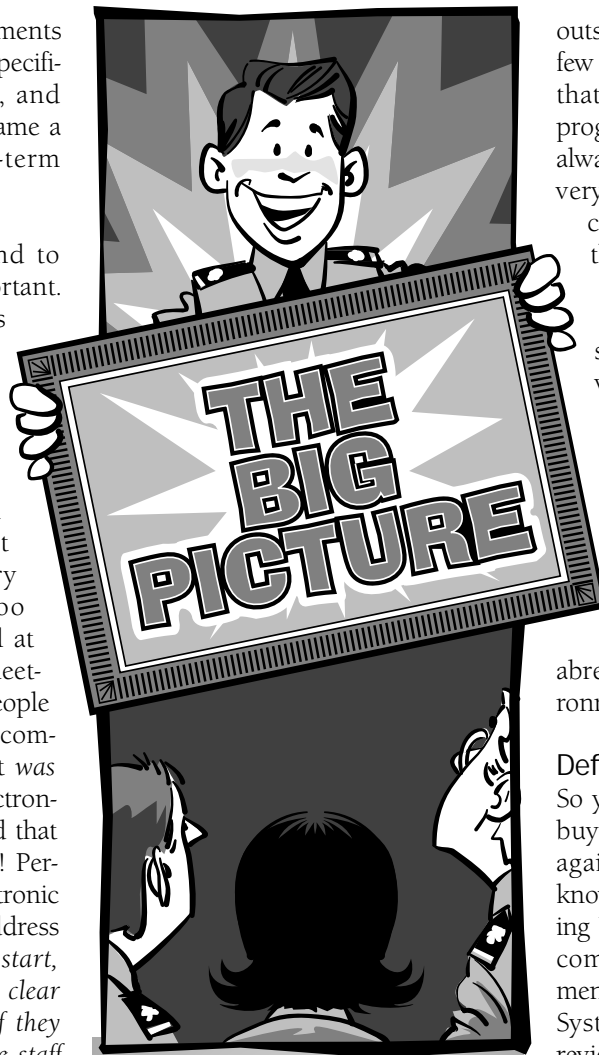
term goals. Completing sub-elements for documents such as system specifications, source selection plan, and Memoranda of Agreement (to name a few) serve as excellent short-term inchstones.

How program managers intend to manage the inchstones is important. Will they hold periodic status meetings? Is coordination by electronic mail sufficient? How will decisions be made? By delegation, consensus, or consultation? How will program managers coordinate roles and responsibilities? We found that periodic meetings were very important. The fact is that too many activities are occurring all at once, and that weekly status meetings were often the only time people really communicated. Perhaps, communication occurred because it was face-to-face. Coordination by electronic mail is *not* sufficient. It seemed that everyone was getting everything! Perhaps hierarchical control of electronic mail using shared folders and address groups is necessary. *From the start, program managers must make it clear how decisions are to be made. If they choose to delegate, then the entire staff needs to know who has what decision authority.*

Politics

There is even source selection politics within the program office! Who the Source Selection Authority, Source Selection Advisory Council, and Source Selection Evaluation Panel leads and members will be, can be a sticky subject. These are positions that, if held, look very appealing on any resumé. The source selection structure is also contentious from the point of view of who reports to whom and who has review authority over another. The unstated fear is that subordinates' technical and management credentials as well as their judgment may come under scrutiny.

To avoid many of these pitfalls I would recommend a selection process that includes qualified candidates from



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outside the program office. In all but a few cases, the counter to the argument that the best qualified reside in the program office is that there is almost always another program office with a very similar program. A formal and competitive selection process for these positions provides a sense of fairness within the program office with the added benefit that the selected individuals are now visibly vested with the authority to proceed with much of the source selection planning that clearly requires activity leaders. Politics external to the program office also come into play, but I'll not discuss them here. Suffice it to say, it is important that program managers keep their staffs abreast of the external political environment.

Define What is Being Procured

So you think you know what you are buying? If the answer is yes, check again. Most often a program office knows they are procuring an Engineering Development Widget. But, when it comes to actually writing the Statement of Work, we find that there are Systems Engineering, ICDs, reports, reviews, that also need to be bought. Further, the hardware that is being bought may have fuzzy interfaces that no one had thought of yet...and probably had no reason to think of yet.

The program manager needs to be available to clear up misunderstandings of what is actually being bought. The program office's understanding of what is being bought *can not* take a back seat. This is a crucial ingredient to a smooth-running planning process. Program managers need to answer these questions as soon as possible. If program managers delay, their staffs may inadvertently proceed in a direction exceeding the program managers' authority. Or worse, the staffs will coalesce into camps complete with studies and presentations supporting their viewpoint of "what is being bought." How much more gentlemanly/ladylike than for the bosses to charter a study to look at different options from

which they can choose and make a decision.

Assign Responsibilities

"Who's in charge?" will be asked and heard often if roles and responsibilities are not defined early in the source selection planning process. In this regard program offices need program managers with backbone. Most everyone in government (especially military personnel) understands authority when it is delegated. Program managers are expected to make tough decisions. Problems arise when authority is perceived as unduly assumed.

The program manager's role as a leader, must clearly delineate lines of authority, accountability, and responsibility. A letter of designation, and perhaps an introduction at a staff meeting, are management tools program managers can use to convey the trust they place in selected individuals who serve in their stead. Program managers will be true to their words if they support the management decisions their selectees make in the same way the program managers' bosses support them. Once the assignments are made, the rest falls in place: documentation seems to get coordinated, ICDs get written, and Memoranda of Agreement get negotiated.

Prepare the Staff

Source selection ethics, conflicts of interest, interactions with industry, interactions with other program offices, and acquisition training are also key elements of the source selection planning process. Can we talk with a long-time friend and retired officer who now works for Loral? Does a member of the program manager's staff have a wife who works for a potential bidder? What kind of questions should/could we answer if a conversation with a contractor makes a turn and places that contractor as a potential bidder?

Experienced program managers will recognize the need to "normalize" their staffs; i.e., running a lecture syllabus or forum where every individual receives a



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refresher on source selection fundamentals specifically tailored to the source selection and the needs of the program office. This is especially beneficial in a Joint program office where the staff acquisition professionals came from the different Services. Though DSMC is beginning to be the common acquisition denominator throughout DoD, there are still some major differences — to name one, the U.S. Air Force's color coding versus the U.S. Navy's numerical evaluations.

"Normalizing" a program office as part of the planning pursuant to source selection will help in the Request for Proposal (RFP) evaluation process as program managers take the added step to provide their entire evaluation staffs a similar perspective from which to evaluate the proposals. Potentially, one hopes that it minimizes the "We do it this way in my Service" arguments that will surely occur during the consensus discussions in a source selection.

Establish Training

Training is such an important part of the staff normalization process that it deserves a few words. The training objective is not to train individuals to be acquisition professionals, but to develop a common understanding of the source selection process that has been established for the acquisition they will be a part of. Additionally, the team will have the opportunity to begin working together in an unpressured seminar environment where they can discuss questions among themselves that may arise during the source selection RFP evaluation.

The Source Selection Evaluator's Guide is the key document from which the training is conducted. Consensus tools and team training are a must. Running a mock source selection with the individuals that will be on the source selection evaluation panel couldn't hurt.

Industry

Industry will smell source selection blood in the water early on. Program

managers need to be aware of the teamings that will occur and the impacts to the number of potential offerors. Some teamings may require a change in acquisition strategy if, for instance the field of potential offerors is decreased to two where once there were six. Their roles in keeping their staffs apprised of any changes in strategy are crucial lest they lose their momentum and motivation. There is nothing more detrimental to motivation than to redirect an energetic staff in a direction that at best appears tentative. Wise is the program manager who establishes policies and procedures when interacting with industry while under "lock-down" for source selection.

Mechanical Process

Okay, what about those silly source selection badges, and the sign-in log, and the blaze orange cones in the hallway, and the electronic mail rules, and the crazy colored source selection document cover sheets, and the ...? Is this really important? You betcha'. The only person that can highlight their importance is the program manager. The goal is to take every precaution to ensure that the source selection rules and procedures were fairly applied to all potential offerors. I have observed that when the program manager sets the tone in this regard, everyone else harmonizes to it.

Conclusion

Mitigate and Coordinate. Successful program managers set the pace, delegate, support, advocate, listen, direct, encourage, coordinate, arbitrate, and mitigate issues at every step of the source selection yellow brick road. They deal with issues both internal and external to the program office. They are decisive and keep their staffs informed. They are ethical and fair. Finally, when it comes to source selection planning, they follow, to the best of their ability, the rules they and their staffs developed for the source selection. It is at this point that program managers either win or lose respect as they must now "walk the talk."



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INSIDE DSMC

Lt. Col. Michael S. Ennis, USAF, departed the College on March 29, 1996, for his new assignment as Program Manager for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Air Warning and Control System (AWACS), Electronic Systems Center, Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts. Mike initially came to DSMC as a Research Fellow in the Research, Consulting and Information Division in August 1994, followed by his selection as Executive Officer to the Commandant in July 1995.



His Air Force career spans nearly 18 years of service and includes several key assignments at Mather Air Force Base, California; Yokota Air Base, Japan; Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany; and Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts. His military awards include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal (1st Oak Leaf Cluster); Meritorious Service Medal (2nd Oak Leaf Cluster); Air Force Commendation Medal; and the Army Commendation Medal.

O O P S !

The March-April 1996 issue of *Program Manager* (p. 21) contained an article entitled "About Your Subscription," in which we inadvertently listed an incorrect Internet address for Carrie Simpson. The correct address should read:

simpsonc@dsmc.dsmc.mil

Moving along to p. 45, please note the following correction to the paragraph entitled "ISO 9000, Quality Management and Quality Assurance Standards — Guidelines for Selection and Use." The 1987 ISO 9000 document was superseded by ISO 9000-1 in 1994. Similarly, ISO 9004 was superseded by ISO 9004-1.

On p. 56 of the same issue, under "Editor's Note," the correct phone number for the University of Texas at Austin is 1-800-218-6782.